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**The Application of the Aerospace
Expeditionary Force Concept to Reserve
Tactical Air Components**

By

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy

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Abstract
Of
The Application of the Aerospace Expeditionary Force Concept
To Reserve Tactical Air Components

Since the end of the Cold War, reductions in U.S. defense spending and military force structure has left our armed forces stretched too thin. No longer focused on defeating a peer competitor in a Major Theater War, U.S. military personnel now find themselves deployed overseas for a myriad of non-traditional, regionally focused Smaller-Scale Contingencies. Much of this increased tasking has fallen upon our Active Component (AC) Tactical Air (TACAIR) forces. However, the greater utilization of this combat arm in the 1990s has resulted in a "do-more-with-less" dilemma that has severely taxed AC TACAIR resources. Operational and personnel tempo rates are at levels that degrade aircraft material readiness, spare part inventories and personnel retention in all the Services. Since our National Military Strategy requires U.S. forces to be forward deployed and "globally engaged", CINC tasking of finite AC TACAIR forces for overseas deployments will not likely decrease in the foreseeable future. Therefore, the Services must begin to explore more innovative ways to take advantage of a relatively underutilized resource: its substantial Reserve Component tactical air capability. Transforming our reserve TACAIR units into "selectively expeditionary" force packages modeled after the Air Force's Aerospace Expeditionary Force concept promises to be one such innovation, providing a "force multiplier" for the CINCs while offering much needed relief for overburdened AC units.

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to examine the feasibility of deploying Reserve Component (RC) Tactical Air (TACAIR)* units and personnel overseas to meet combatant Commanders-In-Chief's (CINC) requirements. The Aerospace Expeditionary Force (AEF) concept developed by the Air Force (USAF) will be used as model to compare and contrast various issues surrounding the deployment of Reserve Component (RC) TACAIR units. Key issues that will be examined in greater detail include: The impact to the U.S. military in the post-Cold War era of changes to National Military Strategy (NMS), force reductions and increased overseas deployments; The affect these events have had on the force employment methods and operational base orientations of the Active Component (AC) and RC TACAIR forces of the Services; How each Service has adapted to these changes and their current approach to accomplishing CINC support missions.

Analysis of these topics and other issues will support the following conclusions:

1. The Services are under-utilizing their RC TACAIR units and personnel in the overseas CINC support missions limiting CINC options and negatively impacting AC forces.
2. The AEF construct has the potential to be an effective method for deploying RC TACAIR units overseas for CINC support missions.
3. The Naval Reserve (USNR), Marine Corps Reserve (USMCR), Air Force Reserve (AFRES) and Air National Guard (ANG) possess enough TACAIR force structure to form an effective deployment force of either same-Service Reserve AEFs (RAEFs) or joint Service RAEFs (JRAEFs).

* The use of the term "TACAIR" for the purposes of this paper is limited to fixed-wing strike and fighter units of the Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps and Air National Guard, specifically F/A-18, F-15, F-16 and A-10 units

Increasing Demands, Diminishing Resources and the Postmodern Military

We must recognize the chief characteristic of the modern era - a permanent state of what I call violent peace - Admiral James D. Watkins

The "American Way of War" is to consider war an anomaly and peace to be the norm.¹ Coupled with our traditional prejudice against a large standing military, this historically leads to reductions in U.S. military forces following victory in major wars.² The collapse of the Soviet Union in the late 1980s and our victory in the Cold War generated another such cycle. With the U.S. as the only remaining world superpower, a belief emerged that a large active duty military was no longer needed since the Soviet threat to U.S. interests worldwide had evaporated.³ This led to a predictable decline in active duty personnel and defense spending that by the end of the 1990s reduced AC forces by 32%.⁴ The NMS of the Cold War era was also changing during this period in response to a changing world. It soon evolved from a strategy of a static, forward defense along clearly defined frontiers to one of global engagement; from one focused on Major Theater War (MTW) against a peer competitor to one concerned with conducting flexible and selective engagements in regional conflicts in an uncertain world.⁵ However, history has once again shown that "the mere absence of war is not peace."⁶ More and more the U.S. military began to be engaged in Smaller-Scale Contingencies (SSCs) in several CINC Areas of Responsibility (AORs), especially in U.S. European Command (EUCOM) and U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM). Since 1990, the U.S. has deployed its military 149 times for "peacekeeping" missions compared with only 17 times in the last eight years of the 1980s.⁷ This trend is also consistent with the increase AC TACAIR

deployments in the last decade. Tactical air power's advantages of precision engagement, flexible application, and minimal risk to U.S. forces has made this combat arm an attractive option for the CINC. This is especially true when the National Command Authority (NCA) or the American public does not support a commitment of ground forces to the conflict.

With one-third less forces than a decade ago and a NMS that is centered on providing a "visible posture of US forces and infrastructure ...positioned forward, in or near key regions,"⁸ the Services are finding it difficult to keep pace with a deployment tempo that continues unabated. A recent study of these factors and their impact presents a picture of the U.S. military as a "a stressed and overcommitted" institution.⁹ This period of increasing demand and diminishing resources has been described as the "postmodern" era in our military's history.¹⁰

An understanding of these present day dynamics and their effect on the AC and RC TACAIR force can begin to provide insight into how the Services can develop strategies to effectively utilize existing TACAIR assets to respond to CINC tasking.

TACAIR Force Employment Methods and Operational Base Orientations

During the Cold War, the NMS focused on the concepts of forward defense and forward containment of the Soviet threat. Each Service used two basic methods of force employment as a means to deploy its AC TACAIR forces to overseas CINC AORs. The Navy (USN) and Marine Corps (USMC) AC TACAIR squadrons epitomized "expeditionary" air power employment: extended overseas deployments, primarily from aircraft carriers, from permanent home bases located in CONUS.* The force employment methods of the Air Force were based on a "garrison" approach that located its AC

TACAIR units close to Soviet borders at permanent overseas bases in friendly nations. This negated the need for USAF TACAIR units to undertake OUTCONUS deployments to CINC AORs.

The force employment methods of the Services' RC TACAIR forces were neither "expeditionary" nor "garrison" in nature. Reserve TACAIR forces were CONUS based as a "force-in-waiting", ready to mobilize in established Reserve airwings or air groups to reinforce and sustain forward deployed AC forces containing the initial Soviet attack along the battlefield.¹¹

Operational base orientation is the primary geographic location or platform from which a Service traditionally conducts TACAIR flight operations while forward deployed. These locations or platforms are mostly related to a Service's traditional mission area or unique capabilities. The Navy and Marine Corps normally operate from aircraft carriers or amphibious assault ships and therefore have an operational sea-based orientation. The Air Force has a strictly operational land-based orientation. Today, these operational base orientations of the Services' AC TACAIR units remain unchanged, for the most part, from the Cold War period.

The operational base orientation of the military's RC TACAIR units is oriented towards land bases. This also applies to USNR and USMCR TACAIR squadrons. The USNR and USMCR components do however, attempt to maintain proficiency in carrier and shipboard flight operations annually but remain primarily land-based squadrons.

The force employment methods and operational base orientations of RC TACAIR units will be considered in greater detail later in this paper when evaluating the viability of applying the AEF concept to RC operations.

* "Continental United States"

The AEF Concept: Origins and Structure in Today's Air Force

The USAF AC TACAIR units began facing increased levels of operational and personnel tempo (OP/PERSTEMPO) rates when it relocated the majority of its TACAIR forces back to CONUS bases following the Cold War. This new Air Force operational base orientation required an expeditionary type of force employment as its units and personnel now had to deploy to the CINC's AOR to meet mission tasking. One innovative approach to meeting these new demands on AC units and personnel was the development of the AEF concept.

Although reports differ on the exact details, one Air Force officer says the idea for the AEF began at the conclusion of Operation Vigilant Warrior in October 1994, a rapid U.S. deployment of joint forces to CENTCOM which resulted in the withdrawal of threatening Iraqi troops massed on the Kuwaiti border.¹² Deployed from CONUS bases on short notice, Air Force AC TACAIR units were able to "start flying combat sorties within 48 hours."¹³ Lt. Gen. John P. Jumper, then commander of all Air Force units and personnel in CENTCOM, approached CINCCENT with a request to, "bring about half of (the Air Force's) forces home that's spending 90-day rotations in Southwest Asia"¹⁴ because of the demonstrated ability of the unit's to quickly deploy from a CONUS operational base orientation if another crisis arose. This request was later approved.

The first deployment of an AEF occurred in 1995 to Bahrain in the Persian Gulf.¹⁵ Used to cover a three month gap in carrier deployments to CENTCOM, AEF I consisted of eighteen F-16 aircraft: twelve aircraft dedicated to the air to air combat role and six aircraft dedicated to air to ground combat mission role.¹⁶ The AEF concept proved so successful that the Air Force began to develop plans to realign the

majority of its TACAIR units into deployable composite forces.¹⁷ This scheme has allowed the Air Force to ease the strain on its air combat units by rotating its forces to distribute the deployment burden over a larger pool of squadrons while continuing to meet contingency requirements.¹⁸

The Air Force has created 10 AEFs to date, each consisting of about 150 to 200 aircraft and 10,000 to 15,000 personnel each.¹⁹ When required, individual units are drawn from the “parent” AEF and deployed as smaller force packages based on the number and type of aircraft required to meet CINC support mission. Deployments are scheduled to last no more than 90 days with the “deployment window”^{*} occurring once every 15 months.²⁰

Analysis of AC TACAIR in the Postmodern Military

Each Service has been affected by the changes in force structure and the NMS brought about by the end of the Cold War. The Air Force, because of an almost fundamental change in its TACAIR force employment methods and operational base orientation has experienced far greater changes than Navy and Marine Corps AC TACAIR forces.

The Navy’s AC TACAIR force is primarily employed in an expeditionary manner from an operational sea-based orientation. As Admiral Jay Johnson, Chief of Naval Operations, notes, “On any given day, one-third of the Navy’s forces are forward-deployed and ready to influence, directly and decisively, events ashore from the sea.”²¹ These force employment methods and operational base orientations remain unchanged from the Cold War period. However, reductions in USN AC TACAIR resources has left only 10 active duty Carrier Air Wings (CVWs) to cover global carrier commitments.²² Therefore, the Navy, due primarily to force reductions and not to changes in force employment methods or operational base orientations, has experienced consistently high levels of

OP/PERSTEMPO rates. Efforts to find solutions to this problem such as limiting the length of carrier deployments to six months have not been fully successful.²³

The Marine Corps AC TACAIR units' force employment methods and operational base orientations also remain relatively unchanged from past decades. Current force employment methods continue to be expeditionary in nature. However, the Marine Corps differs from the other Services in that its AC TACAIR forces have both an operational sea-based and land-based orientation. Currently, 40% of the Navy's CVWs have Marine Corps AC TACAIR squadrons assigned to them as well as several Navy amphibious assault ships that deploy regularly with Marine TACAIR squadrons onboard. In addition, Marine AC TACAIR units use an operational land base orientation to meet CINC tasking. Marine Corps units maintain a continuous deployment schedule to support the U.S. Pacific Command in the Far East as well as occasional deployments to land bases in support of other CINCs.²⁴ USMC TACAIR units, whether operationally sea or land base oriented, normally deploy overseas on a six month rotational basis.²⁵ Consequently, Marine Corps active duty TACAIR units are also experiencing increased OP/PERSTEMPO rates over the last decade. Similar to the Navy, these increased levels are due primarily to fewer forces available to keep pace with continuous overseas CINC support missions and not due to changes in force employment methods or operational base orientations.

Air Force TACAIR units, in support of the NMS in the Cold War period, were primarily a garrisoned force--operationally based at host nation airfields situated along static, clearly defined Cold War frontiers.²⁶ Of all of Services, the Air Force faced the most traumatic changes following the collapse of the Soviet Union. By 1989, the Air

* Deployment window refers to the period a unit is eligible to be deployed

Force had lost two-thirds of its overseas bases resulting in a fourfold increase in overseas deployments.²⁷ In response to these events, the Air Force attempted to “re-invented” itself as an “Expeditionary Air Force”²⁸ that would be able to support operations worldwide via a different force employment method. Its new philosophy would be to deploy composite air power force packages in an expeditionary manner from permanent CONUS bases.²⁹ This major change in force employment methods and geographic operational base orientation has resulted in a more “Navy-like” steady-state schedule of overseas deployments for its TACAIR squadrons and a similar “Navy-like” increase in OP/PERSTEMPO. These rates have also had negative results on degraded aircraft readiness rates as well as personnel retention in Air Force TACAIR units.³⁰

As can be seen, events of the past decade have coincided to create a trend towards a more expeditionary military. For some Services, this has caused a major realignment of its AC TACAIR units. For other Services, it has been a matter of continuing traditional force employment methods and operational base orientations. However, for all the Services, the negative impact of force reductions on OP/PERSTEMPO rates in the postmodern military era been universal.

Analysis of RC TACAIR in the Postmodern Military

The current capabilities that reside in today’s RC TACAIR force can be traced to Department of Defense (DoD) initiatives begun in the 1970s. Military planners realized that a gap existed in the ability of the AC forces to carry out the dual strategy of defense and containment of the Soviet threat.³¹ Therefore, efforts began to ensure the RC possessed the equipment and training that would allow it to accomplish its mission of reinforcing and sustaining U.S. forces against the Soviet Union.³² The importance of the

RC to the NMS led to the emergence of a "Total Force" concept designed to fully integrate AC and RC forces.³³ As efforts towards total integration continued, a "horizontal integration" plan was created during the military buildup of the 1980s to re-equip RC TACAIR units with the same modern aircraft flown by the AC TACAIR forces.³⁴ As a result, RC TACAIR units today are equipped and trained to the same level as their AC counterparts.

Improvements brought about by these Total Force initiatives plus the precipitous downsizing of the AC TACAIR forces in the 1990s is causing the AC to rely more heavily on its reserve forces for support in accomplishing operational tasking.³⁵ In the 1980s, the RC was an underutilized asset. Then, approximately one million RC personnel averaged fewer than one million mandays per year.³⁶ Now, "in the last three years, with a Guard and Reserve force that is about 25 percent smaller than a decade ago, we are using Reserve Component personnel at a rate of about 13 million duty-days a year."³⁷

To the CINCs, the RC is quickly becoming an indispensable resource. Charles Cragin, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs states, "We can't really sustain any operations anywhere in the world today without calling on the Reserve Component."³⁸ As one CINC commented recently, "The Reserve Components' contribution to the wide spectrum of operations in the USEUCOM AOR deserves special mention. We could not sustain our current level of operations...without access to units, personnel, and resources in the Reserve Component"³⁹

The most effective use of the RC in the postmodern military may be as a force multiplier able to deploy in conjunction with AC TACAIR in CINC support missions.⁴⁰ The Air Force has already incorporated AFRES forces successfully into the AEF concept.

An Air Force official stated, "From the start, reservists and aircraft from Air Force Reserve Command will play an integral role in air operations in support of the Air Force's expeditionary aerospace force."⁴¹ The Air Force has also demonstrated its confidence that Reserve TACAIR aircrew and units can be counted on when it, "went to the air reserve components first to fill AEFs 1 through 4" viewing the AEF as "an opportunity for the Air Force to use an underutilized resource."⁴²

Another example of RC TACAIR units as force multipliers is VAQ 209, the Navy's Carrier Air Wing Reserve Twenty (CVWR-20) EA-6B squadron. VAQ 209 has deployed several times in the last five years in support of joint EUCOM combat operations in Bosnia, Kosovo and northern Iraq. This is largely due to the designation of all Navy and Marine Corps EA-6B squadrons as High Demand/Low Density (HD/LD) assets. This has resulted in regular CINC support deployments for EA-6B squadrons due to the limited number of HD/LD assets available to meet critical warfighting shortages.⁴³ Other CVWR-20 units* are not utilized in the same overseas role as VAQ 209. As a result, the USNR RC TACAIR force remains essentially a Cold War era, CONUS based "force-in-waiting".

The AEF Concept: Strengths and Limitations

AEFs provide the CINC with a potent warfighting force covering a broad spectrum of capabilities.⁴⁴ AEFs deployed to date have quickly become an indispensable component to CINC forward deployed force requirements.⁴⁵ By the end of March 2000, four AEFs will have completed deployments in support of four CINCs: CENTCOM, EUCOM, U.S. Joint Forces Command and U.S. Southern Command.⁴⁶

Advantages of the AEF construct include its proven successful in achieving a

three-fold purpose of “deterrence during heightened tensions in the world’s hot spots, beef (ing) up the air power in a commander’s area of responsibility, and maintain (ing) a constant force presence in a theater during times when there is a gap, such as when aircraft carriers are rotating duty.”⁴⁷ The Air Force also considers AEFs as a means to “train with coalition partners, and practice rapid deployment”⁴⁸ two missions consistent with Joint Vision 2010 guidance of transforming military units into “agile organizations” that are “responsive to contingencies, will less startup time between deployment and employment”⁴⁹ that are able to successfully conduct combined operations with U.S. allies.⁵⁰ Additionally, these deployments have highlighted several other advantages inherent to the AEFs. The AEF provides the CINC with the ability to tailor the composite force to suit in-theater requirements.⁵¹ The first three AEF deployments have also shown that units and personnel have experienced more stable and predictable deployment schedules.⁵² Also, AEF deployments are of shorter duration with less negative impact on unit OP/PERSTEMPO rates than similar USN and USMC AC TACAIR overseas deployment that normally are six months in duration.

Limitations to the AEF concept include its operational land base orientation. Once established in-theater, this tends to limit AEFs to operating essentially from one geographic location unless host nation basing rights can be expanded. This may inhibit the ability of the NCA or the CINC to move the forces in response to an emerging crisis within an AOR or intra-theater. A recent example of the benefit of mobility in a TACAIR composite force occurred in 1999 during the deployment of the U.S.S. Theodore Roosevelt (CVN-71). During her six month deployment, the carrier and her airwing

* Other CVWR-20 squadrons in addition to VAQ 209 include three F/A-18 and one E-2C squadrons

conducted combat operations in two dramatically theaters, Kosovo and Iraq, in support of two different CINCs, EUCOM and CENTCOM.⁵³ Other potentially limiting factors of the AEF construct includes combat support issues. Since AEFs deploy with only a small number of fighter aircraft, they require more support from the CINC once in-theater. AEF I through III deployed with a limited number of F-15 and F-16 aircraft to perform fighter, strike and suppression of enemy air defenses (SEAD) missions. This limited number and type of aircraft in a composite force would require in-theater CINC assets to provide electronic attack, tanker and command and control capabilities required to conduct combat missions. Also, AEF's need existing in-theater command structure support. AEFs are not designed to deploy as a complete tactical organization but as separate units that align to the existing command structure once established in the CINC AOR.⁵⁴ These factors could restrict AEF deployments in some cases to mature theaters with well established combat support and command organizations.

The Reserve AEF: Implications to the Individual Reservist

The Selected Ready Reservists* (SELRES) are the "center of gravity" of the nation's reserve forces. In a typical reserve unit, the majority of the assigned personnel are in the Ready Reserve. The success or failure of any potential Reserve AEF (RAEF) program will hinge on the program's ability to enable the individual SELRES to fully participate in their unit's OUTCONUS deployments. The current Air Force AEF program has several characteristics that have proven successful in enabling AFRES and ANG personnel to participate in recent USAF AEF deployments.

Of primary importance to any RAEF program is to design an overseas deployment

* SELRES are active members of the Ready Reserve force. SELRES are individuals who balance two sometimes competing careers: one military, one civilian.

schedule that is practical in both length and frequency. This will ensure maximum opportunity for SELRES participation in deployments as well as ensure Reserve personnel have knowledge of deployment schedules months in advance. Commenting on the need of individual Reservists to know well ahead of time both the date of upcoming deployments as well the length, Charles Cragin, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs states, "When we're going to deploy someone, they and their family and their employer need to know as soon as they can. At least as important as that, though, they need to know when they're going to come back."⁵⁴ The importance of predictable return dates cannot be overstated when designing a successful RAEF program. For the SELRES, knowing the deployment schedule over a year or more in advance would, in addition to providing a more stable and predictable deployment schedule, also provide time for "normal training (and) military education..." as well as "enough time (for the SELRES) to get proficiency training, go to school, and have count-on-it time with the family."⁵⁵ Recent integration AFRES and ANG units into USAF AEFs has shown that "having an AEF schedule that is known a year or more in advance will provide Guard/Reserve members and their employers much better notice of deployments, which also facilitates integration into the AEFs."⁵⁶

However, issues still remain concerning the risk of creating a force for OUTCONUS deployments that inherently depends on personnel that are not on continuous active duty. Individual SELRES may choose at any time to leave a unit.** As a comparison, active duty personnel are legally obligated to remain with their unit until transferred or until the end of their enlisted contract or service obligation. This ability to leave a RC unit with

** This is true except when a Selected Reservist is actually on a set of orders or is executing a drill. During these periods, SELRES are legally obligated to satisfactorily complete the duty period.

little or no notice may create instability in RC TACAIR units if SELRES to choose to leave their unit rather than face regular overseas deployments. Because of this situation, military planners must aware that any schedule that increases Reserve unit OP/PERSTEMPO rates to levels commensurate with AC unit OP/PERSTEMPO rates runs the risk of failure. In commenting on AFRES and ANG integration into existing USAF AEFs, Cragin notes, "We must ensure that new concepts like the AEF do not translate into a lower OPTEMPO for the active force at the expense of the Air Reserve components. In short, we cannot address readiness concerns by overtaxing our Reserve components. We need Total Force solutions. We need to closely monitor Reserve component OPTEMPO and PERSTEMPO."⁵⁷ Even today, the current demand on some individual reservists has caused them to re-evaluate continued participation in the Reserve. "The workload...is forcing some people to drop out, and recruitment has fallen off in almost every service. Firing an employee for his or her reserve work is illegal, but promotions and raises can suffer."⁵⁸

Another consideration is the potential inflexibility of RAEF deployments. As stated earlier, the RC personnel's need for a stable and predictable RAEF schedule will potentially afford a CINC less flexibility and less options if an ongoing crisis in the AOR requires TACAIR coverage. A well-coordinated schedule by CINC planners for in-theater relief by another AEF or CVW can likely prevent potential problems in this area. If no relief is available and a critical shortfall would result in the departure of the RAEF, a Presidential Reserve Call-up (PRC) or formal mobilization of the affected reserve units is possible. Once a rare occurrence, five PRCs have been ordered since 1990 beginning with Desert Storm with three currently in effect.⁵⁹

The Reserve AEF: Meeting CINC Warfighting Requirements

Of the several issues surrounding the RAEF concept, the most fundamental is whether the RC has the numbers of aircraft with the required combat capability to create a credible RAEF program. Without sufficient numbers of aircraft, it would be difficult to form enough RAEFs to ensure overseas deployments are of acceptable length and frequency. The correct type of tactical aircraft is also needed to ensure the CINC has the right mix of warfighting capabilities needed for his AOR. Tables I and II compare the RC's number and type of aircraft with the number and type of aircraft that have deployed with AEFs I through III.

Table I: Current RC fighter aircraft by service and mission capability

Service	Fighter Mission Capable Aircraft	Strike Mission Capable Aircraft	SEAD Mission Capable Aircraft
USNR [*]	36	36	40
AFRES ⁰¹	72	51	72
USMCR	48	48	48
ANG ⁰²	696	100	300 ^{**}

Table II: Deployed AEF USAF and ANG aircraft by mission capability

AEF	Fighter Mission Capable Aircraft Deployed	Strike Mission Capable Aircraft Deployed	SEAD Mission Capable Aircraft Deployed
AEF I	0	12	6
AEF II	12	12	6
AEF III	12	12	6

As depicted, RC TACAIR forces possess enough aircraft with the correct mission capability to make an RAEF program feasible.

^{*} USNR and USMCR F/A-18s are multi-role fighters that can perform all three missions. Therefore, F/A-18 aircraft are counted in each category to reflect this multi-mission capability.

Implementation of RAEFs: Issues for the CINC and the Services

Since adequate numbers and types of RC TACAIR aircraft do exist to create a viable Reserve TACAIR expeditionary force, the next concern is what role the RAEF program will play. The two most likely roles for RAEFs are either as additional in-theater combat force packages for the CINC or as serve as replacement forces that act as OP/PERSTEMPO relief providers for AC TACAIR forces.

If used as true force multipliers, RAEFs would deploy independent of AC AEFs and CVWs deployment schedules. This would maximize the amount of TACAIR forces available to the CINCs since an RAEF could deployed to a CINC AOR at the same time an USAF AEF or USN CVW was in-theater on a routine, scheduled deployment. To provide the CINC with this type of force multiplier, one RAEF would have to be in the “deployment window” throughout the year. Based on the current USAF AEF deployment window of 90 days, a deployment schedule involving six RAEFs would allow for an 18 month deployment rotation while meeting a requirement for one RAEF available for deployments throughout the year. An 18 month deployment cycle would also ensure any individual RC unit would have a minimum of 15 months between any 90 day overseas deployments. As illustrated earlier, six RAEFs, each consisting of 30 fighter aircraft, could be formed from existing RC assets with one RAEF each coming from USNR, USMCR and AFRES assets and with three RAEFs composed of ANG assets.* A sufficient number of ANG squadrons would be remaining to continue to act in its current role as an augmentation force for USAF AC AEFs deployments.

If the mission of the RAEF is not as a force multiplier but as a replacement force for

** Approximate total based on F-16 dual mission capabilities. Unlike USNR/USMCR F/A-18 squadrons, not all ANG F-16 squadrons train for SEAD missions even though aircraft are SEAD mission capable.

USAF AEF and USN CVW deployments, fewer RAEFs would have to be formed. This assumes that an RAEF would be incorporated into a combined AC and RC deployment schedule thereby eliminating the need for RAEF coverage throughout the year. By using RAEFs in this role, the Services could reduce AC TACAIR OP/PERSTEMPO rates since RAEFs would be in-theater replacements for active duty units. This could also avoid the problem of creating excessive RC OP/PERSTEMPO levels since RAEFs would presumably deploy only occasionally rather than be "on-call" throughout the year.

Another issue to be resolved would be whether RAEFs should be formed from units from the same Service or a combination of the Services. Same-Service RAEFs would have several advantages. Unity of command would be simplified. Tactical integration of aircrew of the same Service would be easier due to familiarity of Service tactical doctrine. Additionally, a single source funding to pay for operational costs would avoid the complication of determining each Service's "fair share" of the cost of deployment.

Advantages of a Joint Reserve AEF (JRAEF) would include providing a large range of warfighting capabilities from which to form the joint composite force. Such an JRAEF would more likely encompass a wide range of combat capabilities and therefore reduce CINC support requirements. This is a significant advantage for an JRAEF since no single Service's RC encompasses all of the combat support aircraft needed such as electronic attack aircraft, ** tankers and Command and Control *** platforms to conduct combat operations once established on deployment in a CINC's AOR.

Other advantages to the JRAEF concept is avoiding the possibility that one deployment

* Reference Tables I and II on pages 15.

** "Electronic attack" in this context refers to the electronic jamming mission conducted by Navy EA-6B aircraft

*** "Command and Control" aircraft refers to USN E-2C or USAF EA-3 AWACS aircraft

encompasses most, if not all, of the RC TACAIR units of one Service. This has the potential to create significant shortfalls when a Service relies heavily on their RC TACAIR units to provide fleet contributory support missions as is the case with the Navy. Several options could be developed to overcome the potential AC training shortfalls including cooperation among the Services to create joint Service TACAIR training programs to share training assets.

Conclusions

To support our NMS, CINCs require forward deployed forces on a continuous basis. Since the early 1990s, the AC TACAIR assets of all Services have shouldered much of this forward presence requirement. However, the current U.S. military's force structure and a decade of budget cuts have left the Services under-resourced and over-tasked with these overseas CINC support missions. This situation has led to unacceptably high AC OP/PERSTEMPO rates within the Services. These challenges require innovative approaches to utilizing finite TACAIR assets as well as a willingness to use RC TACAIR forces in an expeditionary force employment mode. A Reserve Air Expeditionary Force promises to be one innovative solution worth further examination.

Recommendations

Since several key issues remain unresolved, offering a "laundry list" of specific recommendations would risk providing incomplete and unsatisfactory solutions to the matters described throughout this paper. However, it is clear that the Cold War paradigm of our RC TACAIR assets as strictly a "force-in-waiting" is a luxury the Services can no longer afford. Given the advantages that the AEF construct has provided to both the combatant CINC and Air Force units and personnel, it is time to explore whether the same

type of realignment of RC TACAIR forces can be as successful. The Services should begin to seek ways to use a "selectively expeditionary" force employment method to utilizing Reserve TACAIR units and personnel in meeting its overseas commitments.

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⁴ Chris Vaughn, "Increasing Deployments Weighting Heavily on Reserves, Guard", Fort Worth Star-Telegram, February 6, 2000, 1.

⁵ Charles L. Cragin, "Milestones on the Road to Integration", The Officer Magazine, January-February 2000, 32.

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⁷ Randy Cunningham, "Defense Spending Inceases Falling Short," San Diego Times Union-Tribune, 24 Feb 2000. <<http://www.ebird.dtic.mil/Feb2000/e20000224.htm>>

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¹² Eric Robinson, "Jumper Talks About AEF Concept", Air Force News, May 10, 1996. <http://www.af.mil/news/May1996/n19960510_960446.html>

¹³ John P. Jumper, quoted in Eric Robinson, "Jumper Talks About AEF Concept", Air Force News, May 10, 1996. <http://www.af.mil/news/May1996/n19960510_960446.html>.

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- ²⁴ Air Force News, Cohen Signs Deployment Order To Increase Gulf Force, 13 Nov 98. <http://www.af.mil/news/Nov1998/n19981112_981721.html>.
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